

Message Text

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USMISSION USBERLIN

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USCINCEUR

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, FR, PGOV

SUBJECT: FRENCH INTERNAL POLITICAL SCENE - MAY 1977

SUMMARY: THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF APRIL'S "DETESTABLE PRICE INDEX" -- AS ONE WEEKLY CALLED IT -- OF 1.3 PERCENT WAS -HARDLY WHAT PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING NEEDED TO CELEBRATE HIS THIRD YEAR IN OFFICE ON 27 MAY. ON THE OTHER HAND PRIME MINISTER BARRE'S FINE SHOWING IN HIS TELEVISED DEBATE WITH MITTERRAND, REAFFIRMING FOR THE TIME BEING THE FORMER'S ROLE AS LEADER OF THE MAJORITY, COULD OFFSET SOMEWHAT THE BAD ECONOMIC NEWS. AND A REOCCURRENCE OF PROBLEMS WITHIN THE LEFT, AFTER A LULL OF TWO YEARS, HAS GIVEN NEW HOPE TO SOME OF THE MAJORITY'S DOOM AND GLOOM BOYS. SPARKED BY THE RPR, THE OTHER MAJORITY PARTIES ARE ATTEMPTING TO MAKE UP FOR LOST TIME AND GROUND. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ISSUE THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SESSION IS PROVING LESS TURBULENT THAN EXPECTED, AND TALK OF EARLY ELECTIONS HAS DIMINISHED. MEANWHILE A MINI-CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY HAS RESURFACED AND THE ECOLOGISTS ARE (LITERALLY) MAKING THEMSELVES HEARD ON PIRATE RADIOS. A FEW BOMBINGS IN CORSICA TOPPED OFF THE MONTH, BUT ALREADY ONE CAN SENSE THE POLITICAL CLIMATE GEARING DOWN FOR THE SUMMER. OR MAYBE TWO MONTHS OF NEAR STEADY RAIN HAS BEGUN TO DAMPEN THE POLITICOS' SPIRIT. END SUMMARY

1. THE PRESIDENT: GISCARD IS PLACING HIMSELF MORE THAN EVER ABOVE THE POLITICAL CIRCUS; THOSE WHO ESTIMATE HE IS DOING SO TO PREPARE FOR THE EVENTUALITY OF A LEFT VICTORY IN THE NEXT LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS ARE CORRECT. IN HIS TELEVISED AND JOURNALISTIC INTERVIEWS HE HAS UNFAILINGLY REASSERTED BARRE'S PRIMACY WITHIN THE MAJORITY, CONFIDENTIAL

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PLACING HIMSELF BY EXTENSION OUTSIDE THE FRAY. IRONICALLY THIS GAULLIAN ATTITUDE HAS BEEN USED BY JACQUES CHIRAC TO CONTEST BARRE'S LEADERSHIP (SEE BELOW), THOUGH IN THE PUBLIC FORUM THE ATTACKS HAVE BEEN FOR THE MOST PART OBLIQUE. MICHEL BASSI, CURRENTLY ON THE ELYSEE STAFF, HAS MEANWHILE CREATED AN "ASSOCIATION FOR DEMOCRACY" WITH THE PRESIDENT'S BLESSING. ITS GOAL IS TO MAKE THE MAJORITY'S PHILOSOPHY - THAT IS TO SAY VGE'S PHILOSOPHY - KNOWN DIRECTLY TO THE ELECTORATE, BUT ITS CHANCES OF HAVING ANY BENEFICIAL EFFECT FOR THE MAJORITY IN THE NEXT ELECTIONS ARE MINIMAL. WHEN ON MAY 27 GISCARD CELEBRATED THE THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF HIS ELECTION ON THE ISLAND OF HONAT, PUNDITS WERE QUICK TO DRAW THE ANALOGY "NO MAN IS AN ISLAND," THEY SAID, REFERRING TO GISCARD'S ISOLATION AND THE FACT THAT AT THIS POINT NOT A SINGLE ONE OF THE MAJORITY PARTIES HAD YET SOUGHT HIS ENDORSEMENT FOR 1978.

2. LEADER OF THE MAJORITY: THE PROBLEM OF WHO WILL LEAD

THE MAJORITY INTO THE NEXT LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, THOUGH CHIRAC HIMSELF HAS CALLED IT NOTHING MORE THAN A WORD GAME, /S REAL ENOUGH TO HAVE OCCUPIED THE FOREFRONT OF MAJORITY POLITICS IN MAY. ACCORDING TO EPR LOGIC THE PRESIDENT, BY VOWING TO REMAIN IN OFFICE EVEN SHOULD THE LEFT WIN THE NEXT LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, HAS DISASSOCIATED HIMSELF, AND CONSEQUENTLY HIS PRIME MINISTER, FROM HIS OWN ELECTORATE AND CAN NO LONGER LAY CLAIM TO A PRESIDENTIAL MAJORITY. THUS, WHILE ADVOCATING A KIND OF MAJORITY PACT AS CONCERNINVESTITUDES, CHIRAC FEELS

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FREE TO "OVERSEE" THE CAMPAIGN IN ANY WAY HE SEES FIT.
SO IN A SPEECH IN STRASBOURG ONE DAY BARRE REASSERTS
HIS LEADERSHIP ROLE AND A COUPLE OF DAYS LATER RPR
POLITICAL DELEGATE YVES GUENA DECLARES THAT HE WOULD BE
"SURPRISED" TO SEE BARRE NAMED LEADER OF THE MAJORITY.
MICHEL DEBRE SAYS ON THE RADIO THAT BARRE SHOULD LEAD;
THEN, IN AN EXCESS OF SOPHISTRY, MINISTER OF JUSTICE
PEYREFITTE STATES BARRE WILL BE THE HEAD OF THE MAJORITY
AND CHIRAC ITS PRINCIPAL LEADER. ALMOST CERTAINLY
CHIRAC WILL ACT IN A WAY THAT BEST FURTHERS HIS POLITI-
CAL AMBITIONS. CERTAINLY HE CAN CEDE THE TITLE TO
BARRE WHILE CONTINUING TO ACT AS THE DE FACTO LEADER.

3. THE RPR: AND THE MANNER IN WHICH CHIRAC WILL DO
THIS IS BY CONTINUING TO PUSH HIS MOVEMENT TO THE FORE-
FRONT OF EVERY NATIONAL ISSUE. A LIST OF RPR PROPOSALS
BOTH WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SINCE THE
END OF MARCH COVERS THE FULL TERRAIN OF SUBJECTS CURRENT-
LY UNDER CONSIDERATION: REVISION OF THE DRAFT LAW,
FUNDS FOR FRENCHMEN REPATRIATED FROM NORTH AFRICA, RE-
FORM OF THE BUREAUCRACY AND OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT, WORKERS'
,PARTICIPATION" IN THE BENEFITS AND MANAGEMENT OF INDUS-
TRY, AND FAMILY ASSISTANCE REFORM. AT THE SAME TIME
PARTY INFRASTRUCTURE HAS NOT BEEN NEGLECTED; BY MID-JULY
IT IS EXPECTED THAT ALL 490 CIRCUMSCRIPTIONS WILL HAVE
RPR CANDIDATES IN PLACE FOR THE ELECTIONS. FINALLY, IN
A MOVE THAT ADDS EVEN MORE TO THE RPR'S CLAIM TO LEADER-
SHIP, THE RPR SUCCEEDED IN INDUCING THE GOF TO MAKE AN
IMPORTANT CHANGE IN THE EUROPEAN ASSEMBLY BILL, WHICH
WOULD LIMIT THE RISKS OF THE EUROPEAN ASSEMBLY MAKING
DECISIONS BINDING ON FRANCE. (THEPROPOSAL FOR A SEP-
ARATE, FORMAL AMENDMENT HAS LED TO A SPLIT ON THIS ISSUE
BETWEEN THE RPR AND GOF: PARIS 16878.) BECAUSE OF THE
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RPR'S DYNAMISM, THE OTHER MAJORITY PARTIES, EXCEPTING THE RADICAL SOCIALISTS, ARE ALL LOOKING TO CHIRAC FOR INSPIRATION, EVEN IF THEY'RE NOT IN FULL ACCORD WITH HIS PROPOSALS.

4. THE REST OF THE MAJORITY: THE RADICAL SOCIALISTS, AFTER THEIR STORMY CONGRESS OF MID-MAY (PARIS 14795) ARE LEAVING A BAD TASTE IN EVERYONE'S MOUTH. PRESIDENT JEAN-JACQUES SERVAN-SCHREIBER, ACCUSED OF "FIXING" HIS ELECTION, WAS PUBLICLY BOOED BY SOME OF HIS OWN MILITANTS AT A MAY 27 PRESS CONFERENCE. EDGAR FAURE IS STILL IN THE PROCESS OF TRYING TO CREATE A RADICAL/CHIRACKIAN AMALGAM, AND MAY EVENTUALLY SUCCEED IN LEADING AWAY A NUMBER OF JSS's BOYS. CDS LEADER JEAN LECANNET, WHILE HESITANT ABOUT ACCEPTING CHIRAC AS A MAJORITY LEADER, IS NONETHELESS BATTING EYELASHES AT THE FORMER PM. SUCH ARE DANGEROUS DOINGS FOR A CENTRIST, AND EXPERTS PREDICT THAT LECANNET WILL PAY DEARLY IF HE PERSISTS IN HIS CLUMSY ATTEMPT TO SAVE THE PARTY BY TURNING TO THE CENTRISTS' ARCH-ENEMY, THE GAULLISTS. THE REPUBLICAN PARTY (PR) UNDER JEAN-PIERRE SOISSON (PARIS 15500) ARE OFF TO A SLOW START, BUT THERE IS EVERY INDICATION THAT THEY WILL LINE UP MORE OR LESS BEHIND THE RPR. EVEN THE TINY AND QUASI-MORIBUND CENTRE NATIONALE DES INDEPENDENTS, MOTHER TO THE IR/PR, MANAGED TO GET BARRE AS A GUEST DURING MAY - ONE MORE EXAMPLE, ALBEIT INDIRECT, OF CHIRAC'S INFECTIOUS ABILITY TO GET EVERYONE MOVING.

5. FRANCOIS MITTERRAND: IT'S BEEN A BAD MONTH FOR THE SOCIALIST PARTY FIRST SECRETARY. FIRST CAME HIS SO-CALLED DEFEAT IN THE BARRE DEBATE (ALTHOUGH WHETHER IT WAS A DEFEAT IS OPEN TO QUESTION - SEE PARIS 14201). SUBSEQUENTLY CAME A SPATE OF RUMORS ABOUT MITTERRAND'S HEALTH, TO THE POINT WHERE MITTERRAND, INDULGING IN HIS USUAL SARCASM, HIMSELF PUBLICLY PROTESTED HIS GOOD

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HEALTH. FINALLY, ALL OF THESE EVENTS TOOK PLACE AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF CERES MUSCLE-FLEXING IN PREPARATION FOR THE PARTY CONGRESS AT NANTES. WHILE CERES IS MAKING NO MORE OR LESS PUBLIC REBELLION THAT IT DID PRIOR TO THE 1975 PARTY CONGRESS, THIS TIME IT HURTS MORE. THE PS IS CLOSER TO POWER AND ANY APPEARANCE OF DISSENSION WITHIN THE RANKS THREATENS THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF STATES-MANLIKE RESPONSIBILITY WHICH MITTERRAND IS WORKING HARD TO PROJECT. THE TRADITIONAL CHARGES ARE FLYING BACK AND FORTH (CERES CLAIMS MITTERRAND IS TRYING TO MUZZLE ANY OPPOSITION WITHIN THE PARTY; MITTERRAND ACCUSES THE

CERES OF CREATING SEMI-AUTONOMOUS PARTY WITHIN THE PARTY), BUT THE PREDICTION IS THAT MITTERRAND WILL COME OUT OF THE NANTES CONGRESS WITH HIS HOLD OVER THE PARTY SLIGHTLY REINFORCED.

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6. THE UNITED LEFT: APART FROM INTRA-PS DISSENSION, OTHER OPPOSITION PROBLEMS SURFACED IN MAY, NOT THE LEAST OF WHICH WAS THE PCF PUBLICATION OF THE SUMS DEEMED NECESSARY TO PUT THE COMMON PROGRAM INTO ACTION. CURRENTLY THE NUMBER ONE ISSUE IS THE ACTUALIZATION OF THE COMMON PROGRAM, WITH A SPLIT RUNNING DOWN THE MIDDLE AS TO HOW FAR THE LEFT SHOULD GO. ON ONE SIDE, THE PCF AND MUCH OF CERES ADVOCATE, AMONG OTHER MEASURES, A BROAD RE-EXAMINATION OF THE COMMON PROGRAM, INCLUDING MORE NATIONALIZATIONS. ON THE OTHER SIDE, THE PS MAJORITY AND THE LEFT RADICALS ARE STANDING FIRM ON MOST OF THE 1972 TEXT. THE TRI-PARTITE COMMISSION IS HARD AT WORK TRYING TO REACH COMPROMISES THAT WOULD STRADDLE THE VARIOUS POSITIONS, BUT SUCH A COMPROMISE WILL INEVITABLY DISPLEASE EVERYONE. AS THINGS NOW STAND, THE PCF IS TRYING HARD TO MAKE IT APPEAR THAT IT IS CALLING THE SHOTS. IN FACT, PCF LEADERS ARE COMPLAINING ABOUT MITTERRAND'S TOUGHNESS ON THE SUBSTANCE OF THE PROGRAM, NOTING THAT HE REFUSES TO GO BEYOND THE NEGOTIATED LIMITS (ON NATIONALIZATIONS, FOR EXAMPLE) OF THE 1972 ORIGINAL PROGRAM. THE NEGOTIATIONS LOOK LIKE A LONG, TOUGH, ROCKY ROAD, WITH THE MAJOR SOLACE BEING THAT LEFT LEADERS SHOULD BE ABLE, DUE TO A CHANGE IN PCF THINKING ON DEFENSE (PARIS 14131), TO REACH SOME KIND OF AGREEMENT ON NUCLEAR DEFENSE POLICY. IT MUST BE EVEN SMALLER SOLACE THAT THE TOUCHY SUBJECT OF NATIONALIZING PRIVATE (CHURCH) SCHOOLS HAS AGAIN REARED ITS UGLY HEAD TO EMBARRASS THE PS AND TO REVEAL ANOTHER SPLIT WITHIN THE PARTY.

7. CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY: GENERAL DE BENOUILLE, RPR
DEPUTY AND SIDEKICK TO MARCEL DASSAULT, RESUSCITATED
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THE FRENCH CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY THIS MAY. TWICE BEFORE IN RECENT FRENCH HISTORY -- 1940 AND 1946 -- THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS, UNDER THE NAME MOUVEMENT REPUBLICAIN POPULAIRE (MRP) FLATTER THEMSELVES WITH HAVING "COME TO THE RESCUE OF FRANCE." AIMING AT THE CHRISTIAN

WORKERS' MILIEU, THE PARTY'S GOAL IS TO HALT THE DRAMATIC SUING TO THE LEFT IN RECENT YEARS OF THE FRENCH CATHOLIC VOTE. WITH DASSAULT IN THE BACKGROUND FUNDS ARE NOT LACKING; BUT LECANNET AND CO., O HAVE LONG LAID CLAIM TO BEING THE NEAREST THING TO CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS IN FRANCE, ARE NOT PLEASED. ONE THING IS CERTAIN ALREADY: WHATEVER CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT DEPUTIES SHOULD BE EVENTUALLY ELECTED TO THE ASSEMBLY WILL ASSOCIATE THEMSELVES WITH CHIRAC'S RPR.

8. THE ECOLOGISTS: ANOTHER NEW FORCE ON THE POLITICAL SCENE, ONE THAT FIRST MADE ITS WEIGHT FELT DURING THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, IS THE ECOLOGY MOVEMENT. MORE RECENTLY THEY HAVE BEEN IN THE NEWS FOR THEIR PIRATE RADIO ACTIVITIES. SUCH ILLEGAL BROADCASTING IS IN LINE WITH THE FRENCH ECOLOGISTS BELIEF THAT MODERN MAN MUST THINK SMALL, MUST DECENTRALIZE AND DECONCENTRATE. HENCE THEY ARE OPPOSED NOT ONLY TO HUGE POWER PLANTS, BE THEY NUCLEAR, SOLAR OR OTHERWISE, BUT ALSO TO STATE-RUN RADIO STATIONS THAT BROADCAST FOR ALL OF FRANCE. THEIR WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH CHIRAC AT THE TOWN HALL FELL APART, WITH THE RESULT THAT IN THE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, AS IN THE MUNICIPALS, THE "GREEN VOTE", OPPOSED TO LEFT AND RIGHT, WILL GO "ELSEWHERE," HURTING MAJORITY AND OPPOSITION ALIKE. THUS ONE CAN EXPECT LEFT AND RIGHT TO MAKE MORE EFFORTS TO COURT THE ECOLOGISTS AS ELECTION TIME APPROACHES.

9. THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY: THE STORMY SPRING SESSION PREDICTED IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY HAS NOT TAKEN PLACE, MAINLY BECAUSE THE RPR DECIDED TO GO EASY. GOF BACKED CONFIDENTIAL

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DOWN A BIT OF THE PROFESSIONAL TAX BILL; THE RPR SEEMED TO BE BACKING DOWN A BIT ON THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT; AND THE REALLY TOUCHY SUBJECTS SUCH AS A CHANGE IN VOTING PROCEDURES AND THE IMF HAVE BEEN PUT OFF FOR THE TIME BEING. EVEN THE PCF GOT A FEW BILLS VOTED, A RARE EVENT. THE RPR ONLY HAD TO USE ONCE (ON THE PROFESSIONAL TAX BILL) ARTICLE 91 OF THE ASSEMBLY STATUTES' WHICH IS IN EFFECT A SNEAKY WAY OF NEGATING MUCH OF THE FORCE OF ARTICLE 49 OF THE CONSTITUTION. UNDER ARTICLE 49, WHICH IT WAS RUMORED GISCARD WOULD USE RUTHLESSLY, A BILL BECOMES LAW AUTOMATICALLY WITHIN 24 HOURS UNLESS THE ASSEMBLY VOTES A MOTION OF CENSURE' AN ACT THE RPR WOULD BE MOST RELUCTANT TO UNDER TAKE. AND SO THE SITZKRIEG PERSISTS BETWEEN THE ELYSEE AND THE TOUR MONTPARNASSE.

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10. CONCLUSION: IN 1974 AND 1975 THE FRENCH LEFT UNDERWENT A PERIOD OF BITTER STRIFE THAT HAD SOME OBSERVERS PREDICTING THE RUPTURE OF THE COMMON PROGRAM. IN 1976 AND FOR MOST OF THIS YEAR IT WAS THE MAJORITY'S TURN TO SLASH OUT AT ONE ANOTHER. IS THE PENDULUM NOW SWINGING BACK? IF SO, IT IS UNLIKELY THE SWING WILL BE AS EXTREME AS IN THE PAST. WITH THE LEFT SO CLOSE TO POWER IT CAN TASTE IT, AN OPEN BREACH OR PUBLIC DISPLAY OF ANTAGONISM WILL BE AVOIDED AT ANY COST. BUT IN THIS SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES, THE PCF HAS THE UPPER HAND. WHILE HE CANNOT DICTATE HIS WILL TO THE EXTENT HE WISHES, PCF LEADER MARCHAIS KNOWS THAT THE UNITED LEFT IS GOING NOWHERE WITHOUT HIS TROOPS. MARCHAIS' PUBLIC APPEARANCES IN MAY HAVE BEEN FREQUENT AND, IT MUST BE SAID, FLATTERING TO HIS IMAGE. THIS STANDS IN MARKED CONTRAST TO MITTERRAND'S CURRENTLY DIFFICULT POSITION. THE RUMORS OF INDIRECT CONTACT BETWEEN THE ELYSEE AND THE PS FIRST SECRETARY SUGGEST THAT MITTERRAND FEELS HE STANDS TO GAIN BY CONTINUING DIALOGUE ON A HIGHLY DISCREET LEVEL.

11. ALSO TO BE WATCHED IS THE STACCATTO SNIPING FROM THE TOUR MONTPARNASSE, THOUGH IF WE CAN BELIEVE WHAT CHIRAC RECENTLY TOLD THE EMBASSY IN PRIVATE, HE HAS NO DESIRE AT ALL FOR EARLY ELECTIONS. READING BETWEEN THE LINES OF THE RPR PRESIDENT'S COLOMBES SPEECH AT THE END OF THE MONTH, ONE CAN SEE IT, AS MANY JOURNALISTS DID, EITHER AS A SOP TO Giscard OR AS PAVING THE WAY TO FUTURE, PRE-ELECTION DIFFICULTIES. PRIME MINISTER BARRE REMAINS THE QUESTION MARK. THOUGH HIS POPULARITY RATING WENT DOWN DURING MAY, HE HAS UNEQUIVOCALLY MANAGED TO ASSERT HIMSELF AS A POLITICIAN, AN ECONOMIST AND A FIGHTER. BESIDES, HE DOES NOT HAVE THE ENARCH LABEL,

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ANATHEMA TO SO MANY PROVINCIAL FRENCHMEN. CHIRAC SEEMS TO HAVE SET ASIDE HIS EFFORTS TO UNDERMINE BARRE'S EFFICACITY (THROUGH FAILING TO SUPPORT BARRE'S PROPOSALS) LENDING CREDENCE TO THOSE WHO SURMISE THAT CHIRAC REALLY HAD DECIDED NOT TO PRECIPITATE EARLY ELECTIONS. IN THE MERRY MONTH OF MAY, ONE COULD SAY THE MAJORITY IS SMILING SO HARD IT HURTS.

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